

MICHAEL KOR: OCT. 24, 1925 – OCT. 19, 2021

Farewell, Mickey



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

A familiar face: Mickey Kor smiles for the camera during the unveiling of his Coca-Cola bottle on Saturday, April 28, 2018, in the CANDLES Holocaust Museum. A portrait of a younger Kor has been painted on the bottle along with various other details from his life.



Submitted photo

Campaign stop: Terre Haute residents Pat Etling (third from left) and Mickey Kor (right) stand near 1968 presidential candidate Robert Kennedy during a campaign stop at the Terre Haute House April 10, 1968.



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

Hello: Mickey Kor waves to the crowd as he and his wife, the late Eva Kor, receive a standing ovation after they were introduced by the late Gov. Joe Kernan on Jan. 13, 2004, at the Statehouse.

Terre Haute loses 'the sweetest guy'

BY DAVID KRONKE
TRIBUNE-STAR

Mickey Kor, a Holocaust survivor who moved to Terre Haute after World War II and later married fellow survivor Eva Mozes, died peacefully in his sleep at 6:01 a.m. Tuesday after a series of illnesses.

He was 95.

Eva Mozes Kor founded and opened the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Terre Haute while Mickey seemed content to operate outside the limelight. She died in Poland on July 4, 2019.

Alex Kor, Mickey and Eva's son, said that he had just watched a football game with his father featuring Mickey's beloved Purdue Boilermakers on Saturday, "knowing it would be the last football game we would watch."

On Tuesday, Alex announced his father's death on social media with a photo of them watching a game.

Turn to **KOR**, A5

Kor: Was only 20 years old when he came to the U.S. after World War II

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For four years beginning in December of 1941, Mickey Kor withstood repeated beatings in a series of labor and concentration camps in German-occupied territory. While being led on a death march by German soldiers fearing the end of the war in 1945, Kor, then 19, escaped from his captors and hid while he heard U.S. and Nazi forces exchange machine-gun fire.

The next day, he encountered U.S. G.I.s in a park and raised his hands cautiously. They asked him, "how does it feel to be free, kid?"

The American troops gave him his first Coca-Cola – Alex Kor said Mickey called the drink "his Champagne" – and replaced his lice-strewn clothing with military fatigues.

He soon met the soldiers' commanding officer, Lt. Col. Andrew Nehf of Terre Haute, and was soon recruited to serve as Nehf's translator as the unit traversed the area rebuilding damaged infrastructure. When Nehf returned home, Kor told him, "I want to go where you guys come from."

Nehf advocated for Kor's immigration and Kor arrived in New York Harbor aboard the S.S. Marine Flasher in May of 1946. He was 20.

Nehf located a host family with whom Kor lived in Terre Haute while attending high school. He graduated from Purdue University's School of Pharmacy in 1952 and served as a military pharmacist stationed in Osaka, Japan, during the Korean War.

"Mickey was the sweetest guy I've ever known," said Ted Green, who while making the Holocaust documentary "Eva: A-7063" with Mika Brown, became one of Alex Kor's closest friends. "To endure four years of merciless beatings, and keep that goodness and kindness and that beautiful smile for 76 years."

Green added, "I got to witness Alex caring for his father – especially recently, I sat there in awe seeing him dote on his father, doing everything he could to make his final days comfortable. He'd talk about Dean Martin and Purdue football and basketball – his father wouldn't react to anyone else, but he would to Alex."

MEETING EVA

In 1960, while visiting Israel, Mickey was set up on a blind date with Eva Mozes, who had been living in Israel since 1950 with her twin sister Miriam.

Alex wryly noted that Eva was considered at the time a "hag" because she was 27 and had not yet married – two weeks later, that was no longer the case, as after a whirlwind romance, Mickey and Eva tied the knot. She returned to Terre Haute with Mickey, which she compared to "landing on the moon."

As a child, Alex and his sister, Rina, heard Eva and Mickey tell stories of their time in concentration camps.

"He would reluctantly tell the stories – to hide from the pain, he would make jokes," Alex recalled.



Tribune-Star file/Joseph C. Garza

The sunshine of forgiveness: Michael Kor relates his story as a concentration camp prisoner Friday, Sept. 11, 2010, at the CANDLES Museum and remembers how the fall of the Nazi war machine was like "beautiful sunshine had broken through the cloudy skies of the torturous Nazi regime."



Photo courtesy of Ted Green

At the game: Clockwise from left are Mickey Kor, filmmaker Ted Green, Kor family friend Dr. John Abrams and Alex Kor at the Crossroad Classics basketball tournament.

"But it was no secret – we knew what had happened to both my parents."

When Eva opened CANDLES in 1995, Mickey worked there as a volunteer. Though he had shared the story of his past with his children, Mickey had never publicly spoken about his own wartime experience. But when a visiting class expressed disappointment that Eva was not available to share her story, Kor broke his silence in 1997, delivering his first lecture. He continued to speak out until 2020.

"He would do anything for Eva," Green said. "He loved her dearly to the end."

FORGIVENESS

It was also in 2020 that Mickey followed Eva in her tradition of forgiving Nazis responsible for their atrocities. In 1995, the same year she opened CANDLES, Eva made headlines when she returned to Auschwitz on the 50th anniversary of its liberation to announce that she had forgiven the Nazis.

In July of last year, Mickey forgave Bruno Dey, who was a guard at Stutthof concentration camp in Poland, one of the camps where Kor was interred.

Even though Mickey did not specifically remember Dey, his son, Alex read the statement he heard his father recite, which said in part, "Every day in Stutthof, we were afraid for our lives, but it is all forgotten now. You no longer keep track and you do not choose your feelings."

"My feelings are that in war, people are caught in events that they cannot control," Mickey's words continued. "The war is over and he should be forgiven. I do not want any more punishments. The war is over."

Alex Kor said "My dad was in sound mind and body" when he forgave Dey. "I had no idea what his response would be," Alex added. "I thought he might say, 'I can't do it,' but he did exactly the opposite. I think he did it to honor her legacy. He felt at some point the need to learn from the past."

'HIS MEMORY ... A BLESSING'

The Kor family issued a statement on Tuesday, which read in part:

"Mickey was a loving and devoted husband and father, a meticulous pharmacist, loyal United States



Photo courtesy of Ted Green

Walking together: Mickey Kor, above, and his wife, Eva, walk down a hallway together.

Army veteran, an avid supporter of Purdue University basketball and football, and a brave survivor of the Holocaust. Over a torturous period of almost four years, Mickey was used as slave labor in at least three Nazi concentration camps."

The statement concluded, "He was a familiar and beloved face at Purdue home basketball and football games and enjoyed following and discussing politics, writing letters to the editor, watching sports, playing the piano, and singing along with Dean Martin. He is often remembered as the man who whistled while he walked at The Meadows."

A statement issued by CANDLES read in part:

"When our founding survivor Eva Mozes Kor opened CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center in 1995, he stood by her side. And he remained by her side when they had to rebuild the museum after the arson attack in 2003. Mickey volunteered at CANDLES as a docent, always greeting any guests with the utmost politeness, and he could often be found in the back of the museum happily playing the piano for anyone who would listen. Mickey utilized his passion for sports when sharing his story with visitors. When parts of his story became too hard to tell he would use sport analogies to continue. ... May his memory be a

blessing."

Troy Fears, CANDLES' executive director, added, "It's a tremendous loss, not just for CANDLES but for the entire Wabash Valley. Mickey was a great person and a great survivor."

THE BOILERMAKERS

Mickey was also a great fan of Purdue Boilermaker sports. Perhaps as a way of mitigating painful memories, he was a dedicated attendee of football and basketball games, being a season ticketholder since the mid-'90s.

Alex recalled sitting in his father's lap and watching his first Purdue basketball game as a 3-year-old. Eva once said, "Mickey was treated worse than an animal in his formative years. Focusing on Purdue basketball and football was not only entertaining, but everybody was equal there. He finally belonged to his group."

Fears added, "Personally, as a Purdue alumni, I was glad he could witness Purdue beating No. 2 Iowa [on Saturday]. I like to think they did it for him."

Filmmaker Green concluded, "Even in these moments of terrible sorrow, I think Alex is joyful he got so much time with both of them. It's a cause for celebration."

David Kronke can be reached at 812-231-4232 or at david.kronke@tribstar.com.